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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study designed to (1) identify valid items that school boards must consider to assure that lay participation is encouraged and controlled; and (2) determine to what extent these items were incorporated into the present school board policy manuals, and to what extent they were being used in the practices of school boards during the course of their meetings. The study produced recommendations designed to ameliorate conditions such as the lack of communication between boards and constituents, distrust of one group by another, chaotic meetings, and a lack of knowledge concerning what constitutes adequate policy for lay participation. Guidelines were developed both for written statements by the board and for meeting procedures. (Author/JF)

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GUIDELINES FOR LAY PARTICIPATION

AT SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS

IN OHIO

A Monograph By

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GUIDELINES FOR LAY PARTICIPATION
AT SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS
IN OHIO

THE PROBLEM

Lay participation at the school board meeting has been labelled by some as one of the last bastions of democracy where the individual may yet present his views concerning the educational enterprise to those who are directly responsible for the setting of policy and the making of decisions in this enterprise. On the other hand, it has been classified by others as definite interference by unknowledgeable persons in the efficient operation of the school system.

Controversial issues of the times as well as a genuine concern for education have caused a renewed interest in the school board meeting on the part of the general public, an interest which school boards for the most part are ill-equipped and sometimes unwilling to meet. The literature suggests that the school board meeting is an excellent vehicle for effective public relations if properly conducted, and if this participation by the public is handled in such a way as to satisfy the public in its demand to be heard and yet not pose a threat to the school board. Guidelines are needed to assist school boards in coping with this phenomenon.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To identify valid items which school boards need to consider in order to assure that lay participation will at the same time be both encouraged and controlled.
2. To determine to what extent these items were incorporated in the present policy manuals of school boards, and to what extent they were being used in the practices of school boards during the course of their meetings.

A positive result of the study was to make recommendations and suggestions that could ameliorate some of the conditions that presently exist at school board meetings and between school boards and their constituents; for example, lack of communications, distrust of one group by another, chaotic meetings, and lack of knowledge as to what constitutes adequate policy for lay participation. In addition to the suggestions, guidelines were to be developed; one for the written statements of the school board, and the other for the actual meeting. By using either or both, school boards could assess what they presently have and are doing and at the same time be made aware of any deficiencies that might exist.

THE DESIGN

The study consisted of five phases which followed one another in logical order to the final development of the guidelines for school board policy development and school board meeting assessment.

Phase one.

The first phase consisted of the soliciting of various statements which in some manner regulated, encouraged, discouraged, or pertained to lay participation at the school board meeting. These were requested from practicing superintendents, professors of educational administration,

and graduate students in educational administration. These were then supplemented with additional items from the literature.

Phase two.

In phase two, these items were generalized and synthesized, after which they were validated by practitioners in the field through an instrument based on the principle of equal-appearing intervals. Through the use of this instrument each item used was given a rating of its importance in the mind of the respondents. The congruence of the ratings of the respondents on each item was also determined.

Phase three.

Phase three of the study consisted of the construction of the checklists, one for application to policy manuals and one for application to the school board meeting. The items for each list were chosen on the basis of the value of the rating of importance and the lack of ambiguity of the rating among the respondents.

Phase four.

The checklists were applied to selected school board manuals and school board meetings in phase four. Policies checked were those that had indicated on one of the questionnaires that the district had policy for lay participation and that they were willing to send this policy to be checked. Selected school boards that had policies checked were visited at their meetings for further checklist application.

Phase five.

Phase five of the study consisted of an analysis of the data from the checklist applications for the purpose of accepting or rejecting the

null hypotheses of no differences between the established valid guidelines (Theory), what school boards had written as policy (Policy), and what school boards actually practiced in their meetings (Practice).

FINDINGS

A summary of the findings is given below, briefly stated, for the purpose of leading directly to the conclusions drawn.

1. The data show that respondents were an experienced group of administrators, relying on some extent on outside resources for the purpose of formulating policy.
2. Respondents initially submitted over one hundred items for suggestions as to regulating and/or encouraging lay participation.
3. Seventy-two per cent of the respondents indicated they had policy for lay participation, and forty-one per cent said they believed in lay participation on agenda items. Eighty-eight per cent believed in participation during a portion entitled "Hearing the Public".
4. Through the use of the instrument, fourteen items were identified for guiding lay participation which were regarded as important by the respondents and about which they were in agreement.
5. Two checklists were developed for the purpose of comparing school board policies and practices with those items identified by the respondents as being important for effective lay participation at the school board meeting.
6. A summary of the hypotheses which were accepted or rejected at the .05 level follows:
 - a. The hypothesis of no difference between Theory and Policy was rejected. That is to say, when the items for lay participation, that were established as being valid, were compared to what was written in school board policy manuals there was found to be a significant difference. What was written was far less than what was deemed necessary by the respondents.
 - b. The hypothesis of no difference between Theory and Practice was rejected. That is to say, that when the established

items were compared with school board practices there was found to be a significant difference in favor of the established items.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions drawn from this study relate directly to the data gathered, the observations of twenty-nine school board meetings, and the examination of a number of policy manuals of school districts. The conclusions are:

1. It was possible to establish a valid set of guidelines for establishing policy and accompanying rules. Practitioners and theorists in school administration offered many suggestions and assisted in the establishing of the final list through the elimination of those items which might have been meaningless or frivolous. That the list was realistic was established by the fact that several of the schools in the study measured high on the checklists both in Policy and in Practice. One concludes therefore, that superintendents do know what should be included in meaningful policy for lay participation.
2. School boards and/or administrators are reluctant, negligent, or unwilling to develop a policy statement concerning the involvement of the public at the school board meeting. A statement of policy conveys to the reader the belief of the school board. Its broad statement should be used in guiding present and future decisions. It is the statement from which rules and regulations are determined. A statement in the school board manual to the effect that the public is welcome is not a statement of policy, and in no way can be used as to determine what happens when one is in the meeting. It merely stated that the door to the meeting is open.
3. In the greater majority of those school board manuals examined there was a noticeable lack of guidance available to the school board president for handling lay participation.
4. While it was demonstrated that there existed no significant difference between what was found in school board manuals, and what was practiced in the meetings, an additional analysis of the data showed that there was a lack of consistency between the two in terms of the items themselves. In Table 1, one notices that there is a significance in terms of the change in items from one situation to the other. It might be that this could become less significant with additional observations,

but not likely since the numbers show movement in both directions and not in just one. School board practices are already based on multiple observations.

5. Regardless of a school board's feeling towards lay participation, there is generally an apathetic attitude towards establishing any type of procedure for lay participation until the threat of or actual fact of mass assault on the meeting becomes a reality. This threat and its accompanying chaos then make it an absolute necessity to establish some sort of procedure, usually on a hurried basis. Those school boards who had well defined procedures also had considerable participation, and casual interviews with persons in attendance showed this to be commonplace.
6. Of those school board meetings observed where the policy was greater than practice there was a noticeable lack of willingness on the part of the school board president to assume the rights and responsibilities of his office as chairman of the meeting.
7. One final general conclusion, therefore, must be that, based on the data found as a result of this study, the task at hand for school administrators in Ohio is to bring the school board policy and practices concerning lay participation in congruence with what the administrators themselves believe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

"At one time, the school board meeting was easily the dullest affair in town. No one with anything better to do would be caught there."¹ All too often, this is still the case today. In fact, some school boards encourage this and count on it. As recently as 1968, the Public Relations Committee of the New York State School Boards stated: "to publicize meeting dates, times and places, to announce in advance the principal items to be considered, to repeat and repeat and repeat that the public is not only allowed to attend board meetings, but is urged

¹National Education Association, The School Board Meeting, Washington, D. C.: National School Public Relations Councils, 1970, p. 5.

Table 1.

CHI SQUARE OF CHECKLIST ITEMS AS APPLIED TO
POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF SELECTED SCHOOL BOARDS

Item	Policy		Practice		Difference	X2
1	6	-	6	=	0	0.00
2	0	-	7	=	-7	7.00
3	7	-	2	=	5	12.50
4	8	-	2	=	6	18.00
5	2	-	6	=	-4	2.66
6	10	-	4	=	6	9.00
7	1	-	1	=	0	0.00
8	5	-	2	=	3	4.50
9	5	-	2	=	3	4.50
10	3	-	4	=	-1	.25
11	1	-	4	=	-3	2.50
12	2	-	6	=	-4	2.66
13	3	-	4	=	-1	.25
14	5	-	6	=	-1	<u>.16</u>
						63.98

N=10

Chi square = 63.98 df = 13

p .05 < 22.362

p .001 < 34.528

and welcomed to attend can only do good...Most people need only a small dose of board meetings to learn that they can expect to be bored stiff."²

Attendance at a number of school board meetings would give evidence that there are those boards still dedicated to the main business of endlessly discussing bills and reviewing for hours on end routine reports and correspondence. It is these school boards, who, when confronted with a citizen or citizens wishing to be heard, in an all too often militant manner, are totally unprepared to cope with the idea of the lay public invading the domain that for years has been more or less hallowed ground marked for school boards only.

As the emphasis of the school board meeting shifts from the routine to the more meaningful areas of community goals, curriculum discussions, proposal presentations by staff and public, there will be attracted to the meeting parents, community groups, students, teachers, and other school employees who will want to be a part of the meeting and who can not be ignored.

While it was not the specified purpose of the recommendations which follow to suggest ways to make the school board meetings more lively, less boring, and a more effective vehicle for public relations, it was hoped that the use of the recommendations would lead in that direction. The ultimate purpose of the effective use of guidelines for lay participation would be to give control to those meetings which now might be

²Public Relations Committee, Public Relations for School Boards, Albany, New York: New York State School Boards Association, 1968, p. 5.

classified as disorganized and to take the dull meeting out of its lethargy and give it meaning.

A predetermined, carefully deliberated course of action concerning lay participation will not only act as an effective communications vehicle, but will also forestall feelings of distrust and frustration on the part of both citizens and the board. If the public has a question, it then also has the right to know. School boards should not be afraid to be challenged on a position. If they cannot meet the challenge, they should reconsider the position or move aside. Tooman states that,

...boards and administrators have set up (sometimes knowingly, sometimes not) barriers to the right to know...built a kind of "protective shield" that allows them to "turn off" the questioning public anytime the board chooses.³

Therefore since it was the purpose of this study to give guidance to school boards in their attempts at effectively handling lay participation, the following recommendations are made:

Recommendation #1.

A statement of policy must be developed, written, and adopted as a part of the official minutes of the school board. This should not be entered into lightly but with careful, meaningful deliberation so that the result is a policy statement in the true sense of the word. The advantages and disadvantages of the different types of participation should be examined and weighed against each other before the decision is made. This includes participation in the deliberations or "Hearing the Public", both, or neither. Once this statement of policy has been

³Charles L. Tooman, "How to Build Public Distrust in Your School Board," American School Board Journal, Vol. 156, (May 1969), p. 15.

formulated and adopted, the proper regulations can then be constructed for implementing the adopted policy. Without this first step it is meaningless to go further.

Recommendation #2.

It is recommended that school boards and school administrators, once policy has been established, develop the necessary rules and regulations for policy implementation. The SCHOOL BOARD POLICY MANUAL GUIDELINES as shown in Figure 1 are those items which were validated through this study and are presented for use by school boards and administrators.

Recommendation #3.

It is recommended that the SCHOOL BOARD MEETING GUIDELINES, shown in Figure 2, be used as an instrument by school boards to (1) evaluate their practices at the meeting if they have a fairly well defined lay participation procedures, or (2) serve as a vehicle for determining areas of in-service training for school board members and their attempts at coping with lay participation.

Recommendation #4.

It is strongly recommended that school boards prepare and adopt a brochure for distribution at the school board meeting. This brochure, attractively designed, should include the guidelines for lay participation including the manner in which persons would address the board and all of the items suggested in the guidelines. It could also contain pictures and biographical sketches of the board members and other public relations materials.

Recommendation #5.

It is further recommended that chief school administrators take the initiative in guiding their school boards toward the developing of effective lay participation policy and procedure. He is the person who knows what these procedures are and the school board looks to him for guidance in these matters.

Recommendation #6.

It is also recommended that school administrators work at some in-service education with their boards and especially the president in the proper manner in which meetings should be conducted when rules of order have been specified. While most administrators and school boards may not wish for the strict formality of "Robert's Rules of Order", a closer adherence to them is more effective than the "Kaffee Klatsch" approach taken by many school boards. The latter is a gross waste of time and efficiency. The use of the more formal approach with some discretion on the part of the president is more effective.

FIGURE 1.

SCHOOL BOARD POLICY MANUAL GUIDELINES

The exact terminology and the explicit wording of such things as time limits is left to the individual school boards. The list following is merely to remind school boards of those things that should be included. Items are not listed in order of importance, but rather in a chronology as they might occur.

Directions: School boards in using the guidelines which follow, for

either formulating new policy and rules, or for assessing what they now have, should first determine the answer to the following:

1. Is there a comprehensive statement of policy?

Yes ____ No ____ If "No", go to #4.

2. If Yes, does it encompass

Deliberations? Yes ____

"Hearing"? Yes ____

No participation? Yes ____ Go to #5.

3. Using the response to question #2, circle the appropriate "X" in the guidelines which follow if they are found in your manual. Items not circled are those in need of attention. Circle only in accordance with adopted, written statements of your school board.
4. If there is not a comprehensive statement of policy, then that is the first task. When that has been accomplished, go to #2 and follow those directions.
5. If the school board has made policy allowing for no participation, then there is no need for further guidelines. That is all that needs to be done.

Policy Manual Guidelines

<u>Item</u>	<u>Applies to:</u>	
Does the Policy Manual:	Deliberations	Hearing
1. Make provisions for the distribution of agendas, minutes, or other items of information to those attending?	X	X

Does the Policy Manual:	Deliberations	Hearing
2. Specify who is in charge of the meeting and to whom <u>all</u> remarks should be made?	X	X
3. Specify under which rules the meeting is being conducted?	X	
4. Specify at which point and how a lay person may speak to an item on the agenda?	X	
5. Show an agenda or in some other manner indicate at which point the "Hearing the Public" will occur?		X
6. Indicate the procedure involved in:		
a. being placed on the agenda,	X	X
b. being allowed to appear before the board to be "Heard"?		X
7. Indicate whether there are any changes in rules for the "Hearing the Public"?		X
8. Place a time limit on appearances before the board by either individuals or groups?	X	X
9. Establish a procedure by which this time limit may be extended?	X	X
10. Require that persons addressing the board identify themselves and the group they represent?	X	X
11. Specify that all questions from the public must be made to the chairman who will in turn channel them to the proper person?	X	X
12. Indicate under the duties of the President that he require that persons addressing the board keep to the subject at hand?	X	X
13. Specify under the duties of the President that he terminate discussions at an appropriate time?	X	
14. Have a procedure for moving a topic introduced during the "Hearing of the Public" to the agenda for action in case of necessity?		X

FIGURE 2.

SCHOOL BOARD MEETING GUIDELINES

The method by which attendant lay persons are made aware of school board policy and rules is left to the discretion of the individual boards. It may be by word of mouth or by the use of a brochure. The criterion for making the judgment is whether or not an individual attending the school board meeting is made aware that the guideline or rule exists.

Directions for use: If the condition exists at the meeting simply circle the appropriate "X" which is determined by the type of participation recognized by the school board in its policy statement. The number of items left uncircled in the column recognized by the school board are those in need of attention. If there is no policy statement, then one must go back to the SCHOOL BOARD POLICY MANUAL GUIDELINES and begin from that point.

School Board Meeting Guidelines

<u>Item</u>	<u>Applies to:</u>	
	Deliberations	Hearing
Is a person in attendance:		
1. Provided with an agenda and other pertinent materials?	X	X
2. Given knowledge as to who is in charge of the meeting and to whom remarks are to be made?	X	X
3. Made aware under which rules the meeting is being conducted?	X	
4. Made aware of the point at which he may speak to an item on the agenda?	X	

Figure 2. (contd.)

Is a person in attendance:	Deliberations	Hearing
5. Made aware when the "Hearing the Public" will occur?		X
6. Made knowledgeable as to the procedure for:		
a. being placed on the agenda,	X	X
b. being allowed to appear before the board to be "Heard"?		X
7. Given any indication as to any change in rules for the "Hearing the Public"?		X
8. Made aware of the time limit placed on persons or groups addressing the board?	X	X
9. Aware that time limits may be extended?	X	X
10. Required to identify himself and/or the group he represents?	X	X
11. Required to address all questions to the chairman who will channel them to the proper person?	X	X
12. Given a brief summary of the duties of the president at the school board meeting which would include:		
a. his responsibility to keep all discussion to the subject at hand	X	X
b. his responsibility to terminate discussion when appropriate	X	X
13. Given an indication as to when action might be expected on a request made to the board?		X

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